The Chronicle and Index

OF THE UNITARIAN SOCIETY.

No. 46, Vol. iv.] BELFAST, OCTOBER, 1st, 1884. [For Gratuitous Circulation

THE Rev. J. C. Street begs to acknowledge the following contributions in aid of the publication and gratuitous circulation of the *Chronicle and Index*:—Mr. John E. Hargreaves, Bawdlands, Clitheroe, 2/6; and Mr. Thos. Ruddell, Knockramer, Lurgan, 5/-.

THE Rev. J. C. Street begins his Sunday Evening Lectures on the first Sunday in October. His subject is "The work which lies before us." During many years past these Sunday evening Lectures have attracted great attention, and we trust the present course will be as successful as those of any previous season. We hope the young men will be in their places to show the usual attention and courtesy to strangers.

WE have pleasure in calling attention to an Autumnal Sunday School Conference, which is to be held at Rademon, on Saturday, October 11th. The friends at Rademon will take charge of all local arrangements. A Paper will be read by the Rev. W. Reynolds, B.A., of Mountpottinger, and friends from Belfast, Moneyrea, Comber, Rademon, Killinchy, and other places are expected to be present, and take part in the proceedings. Further information respecting details can be had on application at the Depository. We hope there will be a large gathering on the occasion, as the proceedings are sure to be of an interesting character.

IN our April number we drew attention to the fact that a Bazaar was to be held in Belfast in the month of November in aid of the Royal Hospital, and that the ladies of the Second Congregation had decided to take charge of one of the tables. We appealed for help in work or money. Very earnestly we renew our appeal now. The time of the Bazaar is rapidly drawing near, and we hope that all our friends will bestir themselves to make it as successful as possible. Miss Coleman, of Richmond, Antrim Road; Mrs. Parker, of 33, Rugby Road; or the Rev. J. C. Street will gladly receive any contributions that may be sent.

THIS month seems naturally to inaugurate the work of the long winter season. The holiday times are over. The wanderers are back in their places. Pulpit and pew are alike occupied by their familiar tenants. The long evenings are here; classes, meetings, and the activities of indoor life will speedily be in full tide of progress, and we shall all be busy in trying to promote true religion, intellectual development, and moral growth. Our churches in town will all be open, and we hope that large and interested audiences will fill them. The Sunday Schools will be at their work with new scholars and teachers as well as old, and the good work will go on vigourously and happily. Our united efforts will be needed, and we hope a spirit of real earnestness and true devotion will be manifested by all.

IN our advertising columns will be seen the announcement of the programme of the thirteenth session of the Rosemary Street Mutual Improvement Association. A perusal of its contents will show that the new session is likely to be as interesting and valuable as any of its predecessors. The aims of this society have always been very high, and it has succeeded in drawing to itself so many able and intellectual men and women that its proceedings have always been of peculiar attraction. Its roll of member-

ship is a large one, but it needs no great gift of foresight to discover that, with the prospects held before its members in the new session, its ranks will be considerably enlarged. The Monday night meetings of this society form one of the best features of the intellectual and social life of Belfast during the winter.

WE have not yet heard of any appointment being made to fill up any of our vacant pulpits. It will be a source of great satisfaction to us when we hear of good men being settled down at the work, for all times of interregnum are full of difficulty and danger. Broad, earnest, catholic-minded men, ready to co-operate with all, and to know no parties and no differences in our little community, could do a great work, and bring about sweeter and happier times. Such men will bring a benediction with them, and will be heartily welcome.

THE Scottish Unitarian Association are about to hold their anniversary meetings in Glasgow. The Rev. H. E. Dowson is to be the preacher. Representatives from kindred associations are expected to be present and take part in the various proceedings. The association is to be congratulated. Just twelve months ago they established their theological lectureship, and at their annual meeting welcomed the Rev. C. J. Street as the lecturer. After a year's work they are now at the forthcoming anniversary to welcome the Rev. J. E. Stronge as the minister of the joint congregations of Paisley and Kilbarchan. This is genuine growth. In addition to this, the report, which will be laid before the association, will tell of lectures and services at numerous places where the principles of Unitarianism have never before been set forth. Will the time ever come when we shall have so good a record to give of our work in Ireland? We may hope, but apparently the day is not yet.

THE Rev. R. J. Orr has published the sermon which he preached on August 17th in the York Street Non-Subscribing Church, in memory of the late Rev. D. Maginnis. He has entitled it, "Freedom in the House of her Friends." In this sermon Mr. Orr pays an honourable tribute to the character, attainments, and services of Mr. Maginnis, whose name is inseparably connected with the York Street congregation, and with a brave battle for true freedom, and for the cause of higher education. It is fitting that Mr. Orr, who worthily occupies the pulpit so long filled by Mr. Maginnis, should from that pulpit tell the story of his life. Mr. Orr in thus testifying to the worth and work of his conscientious predecessor does honour to himself, and shows that he is following in the true line of apostleship. The sermon is evidently the outcome of a very earnest and religious nature.

THE more active season for the work of the theological lecturer for Scotland is setting in, and we are glad to learn that Mr. Christopher Street has broken new ground at Barrhead and Greenock, and given further attention to Johnstone, in addition to his regular Sunday labors at Paisley and Kilbarchan. He conducted three Sunday evening services at Johnstone, and preached to fair audiences on the subjects, "What I believe about God," "What I believe about Jesus Christ," and "What I believe about Future Life." At Barrhead, a small town four miles from Paisley, the audiences have been small, but the few who attended were deeply interested, thoughtful questions being asked, and words of sympathy being spoken. At the second lecture on "A Rational View of the Bible," Mr. John Patton, of Barrhead, lecturer for the United Kingdom Alliance, presided, and spoke out boldly in advocacy of Unitarian principles. There was an audience of between 60 and 70 at the first lecture at Greenock, the subject being "What is Unitarianism?" The Rev. James C. Street, of Belfast, being in the neighbourhood, presided at this meeting. The audience was of a character above the average. Many persons asked questions from very different points of view. There seems every prospect that the course of lectures at Greenock will do good.

The many North of Ireland friends of the Rev. James Edmund Stronge of Belfast will be

glad to know that he has accepted a cordial and unanimous invitation to the joint pastorate of the churches at Paisley and Kilbarchan, and will enter upon his duties on October 5th. Our readers will remember that both these causes owe their present position to our old friend, the Rev. Christopher J. Street, M.A., of Glasgow. It is scarcely a year since Mr. Street began his work in Scotland; but during that time he has been able to revive the cause at Paisley, which had been practically dead since the resignation of the late Rev. Wm. Bennett, and to establish a new and vigorous congregation at Kilbarchan, five miles away. It is to these churches that Mr. Stronge is now going to minister; and we heartily wish him "God-speed" in his new work. We shall always be glad to hear of the progress of his labours. We are pleased to learn that a Sunday School was commenced at Kilbarchan last month, with every promise of success.

It would be interesting if a Conference could be held of liberal Christians who, during the summer months, have been at the various watering-places and health resorts where no Unitarian services are held, and who have worshipped with their brethren of other denominations, in order that they might relate their experiences. No doubt these experiences would vary, but it is probable that, despite all that is said about the progress in theologic thought, and the increasing enlightenment of the age, the general report would be that the sermons are as full of the ripe flavour of orthodoxy as ever, and that the hymnology has, to a large extent, put Jesus into the place of God. The report would most probably be that the "Father" is almost thrust out of the worship of Christendom, that the Holy Ghost is hardly even a shadow, and that, save in the doxology, even their names are scarcely heard,—while prayer, hymn, and praise are all addressed to Christ as God. The Churches are full of Christolatry, and the work of the reformers will have to be carried on more vigorously and thoroughly than ever. Scepticism and unbelief will be the first steps towards a truer religion.

POPULAR FALLACIES ABOUT THE BIBLE.

The position which the Bible holds in the world is unique. It has seized hold of the hearts of generations. It has been a wonderful support in sorrow, trial, death. It has represented in glowing colours all the moods and tenses of human life. What has it not done for man? It has poured a flood of light upon the world; it has nerved the arm of the soldier and the heart of the martyr; given a godlike strength to weak women; and made heroes and saints of children.

What produces all this? No other book has done as much, though Vedas and Koran have had mighty influence. In searching for the cause of these wondrous effects men have arrived at numerous fallacies.

The Bible is said to be a direct revelation from God.

Broadly stated this may be admitted, but only in the same way that all things about us are revelations from God. But a fallacy lurks under the statement. It is assumed that revelation involves infallibility, and consequently that the different writers were only instruments for conveying in perfect language the thought of God. Hence there can be no error in fact or falseness in doctrine, all parts of the volume are equally inspired, there are no contradictions; a verse from the Bible is sufficient to outweigh all the conclusions of exact science, for it is God speaking to man. Hence Protestants say the Bible is the only authoritative rule of faith and practice; hence also the famous saying of Chillingworth, "the Bible, and the Bible only, is the religion of Protestants."

From these notions have come some of the most abused fallacies. Men have opened their Bibles anywhere, and the first verse their eye has fallen upon they have received as the voice of God. The Bible has been a charm, a talisman, a body-guard. It has been a master trampling upon reason; conscience has been silenced by it, and deepest feelings outraged. In discussion upon doctrine, an appeal to the Bible is thought conclusive and final. Whatever it teaches is held to be true; and if there are, or

appear to be, contradictions, they are to be believed as mysteries, even though they mutually exclude each other.

These are fallacies. Let us appeal to facts in proof of this. Look at the Bible in relation to geology and astronomy. If the Bible is God's word the universe is God's work, there must then be agreement between the two. But they differ. Let us look first at the form of the Book, then at its substance.

(a). It is not one book but many books; not written by one person but many persons. But we do not know these persons, how then can we prove their inspiration? The language they use in describing the same events differs, their quotations from one another are incorrect, or quotations are said to be made which cannot be found. There are 10,000 different readings. We do not know what words were originally used. All the versions differ, no two old MSS. are alike. Clearly then the form is not inspired and infallible.

(b) What of the substance? All is said to be the word of God, but all Christians practically repudiate this. What results from this claim? David's horrid imprecations and Christ's holy teaching are of equal value; the murder of Jael and the rescue of the wayfarer by the Good Samaritan are equally prompted by God; the blasting of a fig-tree for not bearing fruit, though it was not the fruit season, and the forgiveness of the Prodigal Son have the same moral and religious significance. But this is folly as all men know. If we look over the books we find a mingling of good and evil, love and hatred, holiness and sin. Are we to accept both according to the teaching of Dr. Newman? Yes, if the popular notions be true; no, if common sense and human consciousness are at all reliable. In the former case, the Bible is our master, and tyrannizes over our souls; its word is final, its good and evil are alike; reason, conscience, and the religious sentiment are set at defiance. Hence come the absurdities of ecclesiastical dogmas, the contradictions of creeds, the heart-burnings of passionate controversy, the deadly strife of the Churches. Hence come also the horrid doctrines and flat contradictions which revolt tender natures and provoke the synical laugh. From these things secularism and atheism draw their sharpest weapons, and scoffers sneer in cold derision.

But if these notions are given up foes are disarmed, scoffers are silenced, the cold sneer passes from the lips, the reason and conscience assume their rightful position and the soul is made the judge of right.

Take the Bible for what it is—the autobiography of human nature, the out-flowing of grand religious souls, who could no more restrain their utterances than the nightingale her liquid notes; take it with its mixture of weakness and strength, as the religious literature of the most religious people; take it with its warnings and examples; be free to leave its evil and to accept its good, to repudiate what is mean and poor and false, and to accept what is majestic, rich and true, and it will become the life of the soul, the helper of the conscience, the prophet of eternity.

Will this cause the Bible to be undervalued? Will this endanger the truth? Will this check the growth of the religious life?

The truth which is in the Bible must live for ever, its error must pass away. It is so with all truth and all error, for God's dealings are ever the same, and the grand flow of eternal ages will sweep the error away and bring out into divine fulness and perfection the glorious truth of Heaven.

An interesting correspondence is taking place in the columns of the *Inquirer* between the Rev. Charles Voysey and the Rev. H. S. Solly, on the "Canon of Credibility for the Life of Jesus." Mr. Voysey says people are guilty of manufacturing an ideal Jesus, in accordance with their private conceptions of highest excellence. Mr. Solly repudiates this, and argues that by "sifting the records" the aim of men like himself is to ascertain the character of the real Jesus, and then to assign to that character the position which the facts of the case warrant. Mr. Solly's principle of "sifting the record" seems to be that whatever is best is the most genuine. This principle is not acceptable to Mr. Voysey. He says, "by this principle you can eliminate every fault, every error, and

obtain a fancy portrait of any one you please." The correspondence is interesting and well worthy of perusal, but most cautious readers will, not simply out of this correspondence, but from general reading and close observation, come to the conclusion that idealization in regard to Jesus is all but universal among both orthodox and heterodox, and that it is most difficult by any sifting of the records, or any principle of interpretation, to find a clear, reliable, and definite historical portrait of Jesus of Nazareth.

Biblical students generally will learn with sincere regret that *The Expositor*, so long and with such consummate ability edited by Dr. Cox, will pass from his editorial care at Christmas. The regret of a large number of the readers of the magazine will not be mitigated, to say the least, by the information that the contemplated *demission* from the post of editor of Dr. Cox has been resolved upon with the view of putting *The Expositor* into more "orthodox" hands.—*Literary World.*

On the attainment of his 75th year, Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes received letters of congratulation from a great number of the leading literary men of the world, couched in the most affectionate and appreciative terms, and the following is the response made by the "Autocrat of the Breakfast Table":—

"My Dear Friends,—Your kind words reach immeasurably beyond the mark of my desert, but I will own that they give me great pleasure. Coming to me so late in life, they seem almost like open letters of introduction to a celestial household, to which I am commended by my air-breathing friends and associates. Could I but carry them with me as credentials, it seems as if the angels themselves would make obeisance to a new-comer so highly spoken of. Speak as indulgently as you may to one who has crossed the dead line of the Psalmist's reckoning, he cannot forget that he is sitting amid the ruins of the generation to which he belongs—himself a monument, if not a ruin, on which all but himself can read the inscription. Let not the critic weigh too nicely the value of the praise bestowed upon him. A few years will chill and quiet all the excited superlatives which overweening fondness has lavished in his honour. In the meantime, a little overpraise comes too late to do him any great harm. The breath that stirs his slumbering vanity brightens the fire upon his hearth, but fans no dangerous flame of self-love, as it might have done in earlier years. And even the shrivelled centenarian loves a word of praise—it is the sweetmeat of his second infancy. I thank you, each and all of you whose names are on the paper before me, not forgetting those other friends whose tributes of regard and love have reached me through less public channels. They come to me at one of those periods of life when kind works are most needed and most tenderly welcomed. I pray you all to accept this imperfect expression of my feelings as at least showing you that you have conferred a great deal of happiness in obeying a generous impulse."

WHAT IS UNITARIANISM?

This was the subject of a lecture delivered on September 13th, in the Mechanics' Institute, Greenock, by the Rev. Christopher J. Street, M.A., of Glasgow, lecturer for the Scottish Unitarian Christian Association. Mr. Street had applied for the Temperance Institute, but the directors thought fit to refuse his application, as "the constitution of their Trust" would not allow of the hall being used for such a purpose. There was a good attendance. Rev. James C. Street, of Belfast, who was at the time residing at one of the west coast watering-places, occupied the chair. In the course of a few introductory remarks, he said the lecturer would give an exposition of what he called Unitarianism. It might be that many present did not know very much about Unitarianism; but in England, and especially in the United States, where there were plenty of Unitarian churches, the doctrines of that body were well understood. There were very few Unitarian churches in Scotland, and therefore it must be interesting to hear from a theological lecturer from Glasgow what he had to say regarding this form of thought. He (the chairman) did

not know what would be the scope of the lecture, or the manner in which it would be treated, but he was instructed by the lecturer to say that at the close of his address he would be glad to answer any questions that might be put to him bearing on the subject of his remarks. (Applause.) The lecturer, at the outset, referred to the action of the directors of the Temperance Institute in refusing the use of their hall to Unitarians because of their theological principles and held that in doing so the directors had not treated Unitarians as fairly as other denominations were treated. He then explained that his appeal that night was to the freer spirits in the Christian ranks who were not content with doctrinal deformities and spiritual deadness, and also to thinking folk who could not find rational religion in the churches. The keynote of Unitarianism was Life—creed was quite a secondary consideration, important, but not all-important. And here at least their orthodox friends generally did them justice. They acknowledged, however bad their creed might be, that they generally managed to lead good moral lives. A religion that could claim Martineau among the prophets, Longfellow among the poets, Emerson among the philosophers, Carpenter among the scientists, and Chamberlain among the politicians, might hold up its head with pride. To a Unitarian, character was the chief object of religion. It was not a case of "mere morality." Morality obtained its highest sanction in the presence of the living God within the temples of our souls. Inspiration is as great a truth to-day as ever; it is as real and powerful in ourselves as it was in the men of olden time. Salvation is not the main question. It must be, not how can I be saved from something, but what can I attain to? Am I doing God's work? God is so careful not to allow waste in the economy of the universe that He cannot afford to lose a single workman. An eternal hell would be wilful and woful waste. It could do no good to God, to the tortured soul, or to the world at large. God's love, too, would not permit of it. Punishment must be proportionate to the offence both in quantity and quality. Man actually makes his own heaven or hell here, according as he spends his life. There is no mystery of the Trinity in Unitarianism. Indeed, the separate personality of the Holy Ghost is an idea quite thrown into the shade in these days; and the Unitarian denies the deity of Jesus Christ, because he uses his reason and reads his Bible. Jesus stands forth as the greatest of the prophets and teachers of men, whose principles of life are the highest we know, whose thoughts about God are the most spiritual, and whose life was a practical exemplification of the grand truths he taught. The life and death of Jesus derive all their meaning and impressiveness from the fact that he was *only* man. It is our Brother who beckons us on to nobler heights. God needs no bloody sacrifices, least of all the sacrifice of his most faithful child and servant as a propitiation for our sins. God visits upon the head of each the inevitable result of his own free choice. Unitarian theology is built up on the great foundation of trust in God as our Heavenly Father; nothing inconsistent with this will it admit. From His love for every child that he had made, together with the facts of history, we learn that man has not fallen, but risen. Because of God's love, there can be no brimstone pit for even one to be tortured in, no devil to thwart God's will and lead men astray, no damning of little children because a charm has not been pronounced over them by priestly lips. Because God is our Father, there can be no arbitrary selection on His part of a few to be saved and most to be damned, no intercessor needed as a means of communication between Him and us, no punishment of honest though mistaken thought. On the same line we learn to hope for eternal life for all. Immortality is the necessary complement of the life that now is. Good souls deserve to live; and, as for the others, though sin will assuredly be punished, yet God is love, and there is the ground for the great hope. None of us could enjoy heaven while one soul was living in damnation. Science and Scripture are in harmony in declaring that "the Lord our God is *one* Lord." The Bible may be appealed to for confirmation, but not for proof. The lecturer in no way recognised the

Bible as an infallible book. The Bible must be treated exactly like any other book, and then its true worth shines out, and no book can equal it. The spirit of the Bible is thoroughly Unitarian; but the Unitarian accepts the truths of the Bible, not because they are there, but because they are true. He is not ashamed of the name "Religious Rationalist," and means to use the talent of reason which God did not give him to bury in the ground. Reason is the ultimate court of appeal for the solution of mental problems. Conscience is the sure guide in perplexities of the soul. Even the Roman Catholic by an act of reason hands over his reason to the Church, and the Protestant Bible-worshipper uses his reason to interpret the Bible in his own way, though he sometimes pulls himself up and is afraid to trust his guide absolutely. There is no logical position between Roman Catholicism and Religious Rationalism. Unitarianism, therefore, has no stereotyped creed or confession of faith. The mind must be left free to follow the guidance of God's spirit of truth. The hand of sympathy should be held out to science, and there can be no fear of the future, for God's truth can take care of itself. No principles stand out more marked in Unitarianism than the right and duty of free thought and the all-importance of character in religion. "God our Father" and "Man our brother" are its watchwords, and the two duties connected therewith are purity and self-sacrifice. The lecture was listened to with much attention, and at the close a number of questions were put and answered. A vote of thanks to the chairman closed the proceedings.

SPIRITUAL EDUCATION.

The great end of spiritual education is to direct the mind's admiration and reverence aright; to prevent the intrusion of any gross and false homage in place of a true worship; to impart a Christian conception of what is noble and beautiful; to present life to the young aspirant as a scene of sacred responsibility, in which the pursuit of natural good is to be regulated by a holy law, and subordinated to the aim at a holy perfectness. To attain this end, the *Christian* element of the Scriptures must be disengaged from all else; their principles of universal religion be extracted from the temporary and local matter with which they are combined; the essential obligations of human nature be discriminated from the accidental positions of Judaism, and the living Providence of the universe separated from the obsolete politics of Palestine. Perform this analysis; and though you "mutilate the Scriptures," you teach Christianity: omit it; and though you worship the gospel, you miss the evangelic faith. Do this for your children, and the children of our people; and, though they never heard of Canticles or grew familiar with the curses of David, Christ will receive them in his arms: neglect it; and, though they venerate every letter of the Bible, it will be to them a wooden idol that cannot deliver; and the Lord of conscience may yet disown them, and say—Depart from me, I never knew you. —*James Martineau.*

Rosemary Street Mutual Improvement Association.

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THIRTEENTH SESSION, 1884-85.

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The Committee have much pleasure in announcing the following

PROGRAMME UNTIL CHRISTMAS 1884.

1884.

Oct. 6—Opening Soiree.

„ 13—Lecture, "The House of Peers, and what should be done with it." Rev. J. C. Street.

„ 20—Paper, "My Friend's Diary." Mr. Henry Aston, M.A.

„ 27—Paper, "An Unholy Alliance." Mr. F. D. F. O'Connor.

Nov. 3—Music and Readings.

„ 10—Paper, "Treason." Mr. J. Cuming.

„ 17—Discussion, "Is Assisted Emigration desirable in the interests of the People of Ireland?" Opened by Mr. Vere Foster.

„ 24—Paper, "A Few Wayside Ideas concerning Life." Mr. J. Worthington.

Dec. 1—Music and Readings.

„ 8—Miscellaneous (Original) Compositions. Members and Friends.

„ 15—Lecture, "Music." Rev. J. A. Kelly.

„ 22—Paper, "Political Reform." Mr. J. Johnson.

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THE OBJECTS OF THE ASSOCIATION

ARE

The intellectual and moral advancement of its members, and the furtherance of fellowship and acquaintance among them.

The Meetings are held on Monday Evenings at Eight o'clock, in the Rosemary Street Schools.

Admission—To Lectures and Discussion. Members Free; Non-Members, Sixpence each. To Papers, and Music, and Readings—Free.

Member's Subscription.—4s. per annum, which entitles to the use of the Library. Subscriptions for the Thirteenth Session are now due and should be paid to the Treasurer, Thos. Edens Osborne, at 14, Lombard Street, *as early as possible.*

The Librarian will be in attendance after service on Sunday Mornings, and on every Monday Evening during the Session.

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W. W. DRUMMOND, } Secs.

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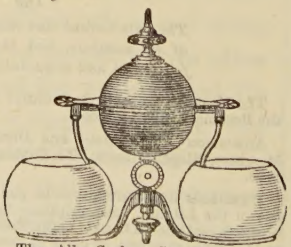

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We invite our friends to call and inspect the new Tracts and Books which are offered for sale at the Depository.

Contributions in aid of the *Chronicle and Index* will be gladly received and acknowledged by the Rev. J. C. STREET.

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